



*Farm to School programs connect schools to local farmers  
by serving local produce in school cafeterias  
and providing agriculture, health, and nutrition education opportunities.*

## **Farm to School FAQs**

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**Q. What is farm-to-school?**

- A. Farm-to-school programs feature school purchases of food (usually fresh fruits and vegetables) from local farmers. Nutrition lessons can be coordinated with the fresh produce being served for lunch. Programs can also include Ag-in-the-Classroom curriculum, school gardens, food tastings and cooking classes, indoor learning labs, and farm/farmers market visits, all of which get students excited about healthy food.

**Q. How do farm-to-school programs contribute to children's health?**

- A. Farm-to-school programs contribute to children's health by helping students develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime. According to research into existing farm-to-school efforts, students choose significantly more servings of fruits and vegetables when given the choice of high quality, farm-fresh produce. When children are well nourished, they learn better.

**Q. Why is farm-to-school good for students in Arkansas?**

- A. In the past decade, the prevalence of childhood obesity doubled and tripled among adolescents. In the state of Arkansas 38% of K-12 students are overweight or obese. These students have a higher risk of developing diabetes, cardiovascular complications, and sleep and kidney problems. Because Arkansas students eat lunch at school and many eat breakfast there as well, schools have an opportunity to improve the nutrition of students they serve.

**Q. Can you really get students to eat fruits and vegetables?**

A. Several research studies have shown that youth will eat more fruits and vegetables when they have easy access to a variety of high quality fresh items, often on a salad bar where they have a lot of choice. Students from different socio-economic levels respond similarly. Research and the experience of educators has also established that students are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables, especially unfamiliar items, if they participate in fun educational activities featuring these foods.

**Q. Farm-to-school programs feature locally grown food. What does locally grown mean?**

A. Arkansas Farm to school programs include food grown anywhere in the state. It also includes food products where the main ingredient has been grown in the state.

**Q. Why is locally processed produce better than produce grown elsewhere?**

A. Because locally grown produce is likely harvested at peak ripeness and brought to the consumer in the shortest time possible, it is often of the highest quality--attractive to the eye, with pleasant odor, flavor, texture and feel-- and if handled properly, with high nutritive value. People are more likely to consume fresh fruits and vegetables when they are of high quality.

**Q. How are farm-to-school programs good for farmers?**

A. Farm-to-school opens up a large new market for farmers. There is potential for significant sales: in Memphis, TN, for example, farmers sold \$10 million worth of local products to Memphis City Schools during the 2011-2012 school year. Statewide, Arkansas schools purchase \$95 million worth of food each year. This represents great opportunity for farms to grow produce and sell to schools.

**Q. How do farm-to-school programs fit into the school lunch program?**

A. Locally grown food can be offered as part of a hot lunch, breakfast, and snack or in some schools is offered on a salad bar. Locally grown fruits and vegetables can also be a great addition to schools that receive the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Grant that is being administered by the Arkansas Department of Education, Child Nutrition Unit.

**Q. How does the school lunch program work?**

A. The school lunch program is federally funded. School districts are reimbursed for every school meal they sell. Reimbursements fall into three categories—free, reduced, and full price.

**Q. Where do schools get the money to buy locally grown produce as part of a farm-to-school program?**

A. School food service directors can purchase locally grown produce with the same federal reimbursement money that they use to buy all their food items.

**Q. What avenues can schools use to purchase locally grown foods?**

A. Schools can buy directly from farmers, from farmers' markets, through an existing distributor or broker who procures from local farmers, or from a growers' cooperative.

**Q. What have other states done to establish successful farm-to-school programs?**

A. Several states have found that a coordinator is very helpful in getting the program up and running. Oklahoma, North Carolina, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Washington have farm-to-school coordinators who facilitate their programs, as do some school districts, such as Santa Fe, New Mexico. California has recently passed legislation funding greater procurement of California-grown fruits and vegetables. In North Carolina, the state provided \$1,000 "start-up" grants the first year to 50 schools to make purchases from NC farmers; \$500 in the second year. The program is now operating successfully without grant funding.

**Q. How can people find out more about the Arkansas farm-to-school program?**

A. Please visit: <http://www.farmtoschool.org> or <http://growhealthy.uark.edu/>

**Q. How can an expanded farm-to-school program benefit Arkansas farmers?**

A. A farm-to-school program could potentially benefit farms of various sizes. Large school districts may be a good market for larger quantities of fruits and vegetables already grown on a commercial scale. Smaller-scale local farms could connect with small and medium-sized schools in the state. A new market for Arkansas farm products could spur farm diversification, encouraging Arkansas farms to grow a greater diversity of crops that could be sold to schools. Farm-to-school could also spur technology and

research to help fruit and vegetable growers in the state become more productive.

**Q. Since the growing season and the school year don't completely coincide, how can the farm-to-school program work in Arkansas?**

A. The seasonality problem can be overcome by working with a school district that has the capacity to process, freeze, and store products for later usage. Other solutions include use of season extension technology by farmers, and targeting products that store well through the winter.

**Q. Does fresh produce have to be inspected by the Arkansas Dept. of Agriculture before schools can use it?**

A. No inspections are required of fresh, raw produce that does not cross state lines. Processed items have to follow food safety procedures established by the county or state. Food service should follow the same procedures for washing as they use with all fresh produce.

**Q. What are some of the barriers to a widespread farm-to-school program being implemented in Arkansas?**

- A. On the farm side, some produce items require immediate cooling after being harvested and many farmers lack this capacity. Farmers need information about what schools want, procurement policy, and in general what they need to do to make ordering from them convenient for food service.
- A. On the school side, food service directors are doing the best they can to serve nutritious food on tight budgets. They lack information about how best to connect with farmers and procure farm-fresh foods. Teachers need educational activities and agriculture/nutrition curriculum to implement.
- A. Distribution and processing are major barriers to providing a significant volume of local produce for school meals. Infrastructure to aggregate, process, and package food for schools is necessary to bring farm to school to scale in Arkansas.

**Q. How are farmers benefitted by the farm-to-school program?**

A. Farmers can diversify their markets by supplying to local schools. Schools represent a steady reliable demand that helps farmers plan their crop planting, harvesting and marketing more effectively. The school year starts as farmers markets are winding down for the year, and provide a market during this low season. Besides direct revenues, farmers are motivated to participate in these programs as it provides an opportunity to

contribute to the health and education of children. The interaction with students, parents and the community often results in additional sales through farmers markets and other avenues.

**Q. How do I find a farmer to supply my school?**

- A. Contact the Arkansas Agriculture Department or Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. You can meet farmers at local farmers markets and talk to them about their interest in selling to your school. You can also ask your produce distributor if they are purchasing anything from local growers.

**Q. Why should schools procure locally?**

- A. Farm-to-school programs, which buy from local farmers, bring additional educational opportunities for children by way of farm tours, school gardens, cooking classes, indoor learning labs, farmer in the classroom and curriculum. Connections with the local farms and agriculture help children better understand the cycle of food from how it is grown and who grows it to how it impacts their bodies, health and the community. All these experiences complete the educational framework that motivates children towards healthier eating habits that will last a lifetime. Consumers all over the United States are realizing the benefits of establishing closer ties with the food producers and farmers in their region. Buying local is good for the economy as it contributes to the growth of small businesses, generates jobs and supports local farming. Local food is good for your community because you can eat the best quality, seasonal foods that are truly fresh and flavorful and at the same time support a local farmer in your community.

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